



State of Arizona  
**Department of Education**

**Tom Horne**  
Superintendent of  
Public Instruction

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MEMORANDUM

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**To:** School Health & Nutrition Program Sponsors

**From:** Mary Szafranski, Deputy Associate Superintendent  
Arizona Department of Education, Health & Nutrition Unit

Lee Renda, NSLP Nutrition Director  
Lynn Ladd, NSLP Health Director  
National School Lunch Program

**Date:** March 4, 2009

**RE:** Ways to Assist Families during Economic Downturn

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*Original Signed*

This memorandum is to discuss how Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) may assist families who may be experiencing financial hardships and reduce the barriers that might keep a family from applying for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) such as the effect of year-long eligibility in regards to changes in income that may occur during the school year.

**Applying during the School Year**

Households may apply for the NSLP at any time during the school year, even if an application they have submitted earlier in the year has been denied. There are no requirements that keep a family from applying or reapplying for benefits during the school year. However, **households who were selected for verification and who were nonresponsive and/or terminated from the program** still must submit income documentation when they reapply for benefits. (Part 8, N. Households that Reapply for Program Benefits, Eligibility Manual for School Meals (manual), January 2008.)

**More Frequent Direct Certification**

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Temporary Assistance Needy Families Program (TANF) have open enrollment so families may apply and become eligible for these programs at any time during the year. To identify any newly eligible children, ADE encourages LEAs to run additional direct certification reports. In order to sort the new students with benefits from the existing students in the direct certification reports, please note that direct certification match results include the DES Decision Date. The DES Decision Date will provide a means to filter or sort match results to exclude 'old' information from previous reports conducted by the LEA. The LEAs should also work with the school district's homeless liaison to promptly identify eligible children.

## **Outreach**

LEAs are encouraged to inform families about the availability of free and reduced price meal benefits for eligible children.

Under certain circumstances, LEAs have the ability to complete an application for a child known to be eligible if the household fails to apply. This option is intended for limited use in individual situations and the application should be completed as follows:

### **Income**

- The school (administrative level) official or school principal must complete an application on behalf of the child based on the best household size and income information.
- The source of the information must be noted on the application.
- Names of household members, social security number and signature need not be secured.
- The household must be notified that the child has been certified to receive free or reduced price benefits.
- School officials should consider providing temporary approval if circumstances warrant. (Part 3, J. Households That Fail to Apply of the manual.)

## **Transfer students**

If families move to new school districts, LEAs can share/accept a child's existing eligibility determination.

When a copy of the application is provided, the accepting LEA should:

- Review the application for arithmetic errors.
- Compare income and household size to Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEG) to assure correct level of benefits were given.

If arithmetic errors occur and the child benefits are in error:

The accepting LEA must notify the household that it must file a new application in the new LEA to receive benefits.

If verification activities or review findings conducted in the accepting LEA occurs and the child benefits are in error, the accepting LEA must make changes. (Part 3, O. Transferring Eligibility between LEAs of the manual)

## **Reporting Changes during the School Year**

While households are not required to report changes in circumstances during the school year, a new application is not required when a household who previously submitted an application for benefits in this school year contacts the LEA to report any changes. The LEA should document the date and details of the reported change and initial the entry. The applications should be recertified. When a change increases the level of benefits (reduced price to free or adding additional members to the household), we encourage LEAs to put the change into effect within three operating days.

Please contact your School Health and Nutrition Specialist at 602-542-8700 if you have any additional questions.

